

Message Text

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R 282200Z AUG 73

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 171431

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EGEN, PFOR, TECH, TH

SUBJ: KRA CANAL

1. WE HAVE REVIEWED CAREFULLY THE ISSUES POSED BY GENERAL PRAPHAT'S WRITTEN REQUEST FOR CORPS OF ENGINEERS REVIEW OF PRELIMINARY KRA CANAL STUDY. NOTWITHSTANDING OUR DESIRE TO AVOID OFFENDING PRAPHAT, WHO MAY HAVE BEEN LED TO BELIEVE THAT THE REQUESTED CORPS OF ENGINEERS PARTICIPATION WOULD BE ROUTINELY APPROVED, WE DO NOT CONSIDER IT PROPER OR ADVISABLE TO GRANT HIS REQUEST. OUR OBJECTIONS BOIL DOWN TO AN APPREHENSION THAT SUCH PARTICIPATION BY A US GOVERNMENT AGENCY COULD BE MISCONSTRUED OR MISREPRESENTED BY THE PROJECT'S PROMOTERS TO IMPLY AN OFFICIAL US INTEREST IN THE PROJECT. IN ADDITION, WE BELIEVE THAT SUCH REVIEW IS NOT NECESSARY AND THAT, IF CONSIDERED BY THE THAI
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PROMOTERS TO BE TECHNICALLY USEFUL, IT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BY OTHER MEANS NOT INVOLVING THE US GOVERNMENT OFFICIALLY.

2. WE ARE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF MIS-

UNDERSTANDING BECAUSE OF THE PERSISTENT EFFORTS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE IN THE PAST BY K. Y. CHOW AND HIS ASSOCIATES TO OBTAIN AN EXPRESSION OF USG INTEREST IN AND EVEN OF SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT. PRESUMABLY, THEY HOPE TO USE INDICATIONS OF US SUPPORT IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ELICIT SUPPORT FROM POTENTIAL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTORS (EVEN FROM THE USG ITSELF) AND PERHAPS IN THE END TO GAIN OUR DIPLOMATIC BACKING AND

OUR PARTICIPATION IN AT LEAST THE NUCLEAR EXCAVATION ASPECT OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT. WE DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO AVOID THESE DANGERS BY SIMPLY STRESSING THE LIMITED AND TECHNICAL CHARACTER OF THE CORPS ROLE.

3. TO ELABORATE FURTHER ON THE FOREGOING, WE FORESEE THE POSSIBILITY, EVEN THE LIKELIHOOD, OF SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES:

A. REGARDLESS OF THE CAVEATS SURROUNDING A CORPS REVIEW, THE REVIEW ITSELF WOULD BE INTERPRETED OR PUBLICLY PORTRAYED AS A CLEAR SIGN OF USG INTEREST AND APPROBATION, AT LEAST INITIALLY;

B. IF THE CORPS, AFTER REVIEW, WERE TO CONCUR IN THE PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDIES (ASSUMING CONCLUSIONS ARE ENCOURAGING) THE IMPACT OF THEIR FINDINGS WOULD PROBABLY BE DETERMINING. CONCURRENCE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE VIEWED AND REPRESENTED AS A SIGNAL OF USG APPROVAL OF PROJECT AND MIGHT WELL LEAD TO QUICKENED INTEREST IN PROJECT ON THE PART OF FINANCIERS ET AL. IF AT SOME LATER STAGE SOMETHING WERE TO GO WRONG, EITHER TECHNICALLY OR FINANCIALLY, THE USG COULD BE HELD LIABLE FOR A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF BLAME;

C. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE CORPS FOR TECHNICAL REASONS FELT COMPELLED TO DISAGREE WITH A FAVORABLE PRE-FEASIBILITY SURVEY, THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE U.S. MIGHT BE EVEN MORE SERIOUS. THE U.S. COULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE

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FOR ATTEMPTING TO BLOCK A PROJECT OF ENORMOUS POTENTIAL BENEFIT TO THAILAND;

D. FINALLY, TO ENABLE THE CORPS TO PROVIDE MORE COMPREHENSIVE FINDINGS, WE CAN FORESEE THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO RESIST PRESSURE FOR CORPS ENGINEERS TO MAKE AN ON-SITE INVESTIGATION IN THAILAND, ETC.

4. BECAUSE OF THE ABOVE-MENTIONED CONCERNS, YOU SHOULD ADVISE PRAPHAT THAT AFTER CAREFUL STUDY WE HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE REQUESTED CORPS OF ENGINEERS REVIEW WOULD NOT BE APPROPRIATE. WE SUGGEST THAT THE US POSITION BE CONVEYED TO PRAPHAT IN A BRIEF LETTER RESPONDING TO HIS LETTER OF

APRIL 18. THE LETTER WOULD SAY SIMPLY THAT, WHILE SYMPATHETIC TO THE RTG DESIRE FOR AN IMPARTIAL REVIEW AND WHILE GRATIFIED BY RTG CONFIDENCE IN THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS, WE MUST REGRETFULLY DECLINE IN ORDER TO AVOID ANY POSSIBLE MISINTERPRETATION OF THE US GOVERNMENT POSITION ON THE

CANAL PROJECT. THAT POSITION IS THAT THE US GOVERNMENT IS NOT PREPARED TO COMMIT ITSELF IN ANY WAY WITH REGARD TO THE TECHNICAL, ECONOMIC, OR POLITICAL FEASIBILITY OF THIS PROPOSED PROJECT AND WE DESIRE THAT NO US GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OR AGENCIES BECOME INVOLVED IN A MANNER THAT COULD BE MISCONSTRUED.

5. IT WOULD PROBABLY BE APPROPRIATE TO HAVE THE WRITTEN RESPONSE SUPPLEMENTED BY FURTHER ORAL EXPLANATION, TOUCHING ON THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL POINTS:

A. CORPS OF ENGINEERS REVIEW OF THE CONSULTANTS' REPORT COULD BE CRITICAL IN DETERMINING WHETHER THE RTG DECIDES TO PROCEED WITH THE PROJECT OR NOT. THIS WOULD INEVITABLY PLACE A HEAVY BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY ON THE CORPS AND IMPLICITLY UPON THE US GOVERNMENT. WE DO NOT WANT THIS RESPONSIBILITY;

B. GIVEN THE ENORMITY OF THE PROJECT, IMPLEMENTATION OF ANY RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS COULD EASILY GIVE RISE TO CONTROVERSY IN THAILAND WHICH COULD BE EMBARRASSING TO THE US GOVERNMENT;
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C. THE FIRMS ENGAGED AS CONSULTANTS ARE HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND WE SEE NO NEED FOR REVIEW PRIOR TO THE MORE DETAILED FEASIBILITY STUDY THAT WOULD FOLLOW IF THE INITIAL STUDY SHOULD LEAD TO A DECISION TO MOVE AHEAD. IF THE RTG SHOULD HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE VALIDITY OF TECHNICAL FINDINGS IN THE PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDY, EXPERTISE FOR REVIEW COULD BE SOUGHT FROM SOURCES OTHER THAN THE CORPS

OF ENGINEERS, ONE POSSIBILITY WOULD BE ANOTHER ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM COMPARABLE TO TAMS. ANOTHER WOULD BE AN AD HOC TECHNICAL REVIEW GROUP COMPOSED OF INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANTS WITH SPECIAL COMPETENCE IN THIS FIELD. IN THIS CONNECTION THE RTG MIGHT CONSIDER THE EXAMPLE OF THE USG PANAMA CANAL STUDY, FOR WHICH A SPECIAL FIVE-MAN PANEL OF EMINENT GEOLOGISTS AND ENGINEERS WAS ENGAGED TO ADVISE AND REVIEW THE WORK OF THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS. WE COULD PROVIDE THE NAMES OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS -- WHO COULD INCLUDE SPECIALISTS WITH CORP OF ENGINEERS EXPERIENCE, WHICH HOPEFULLY WOULD SATISFY THE RTG'S DESIRE TO AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE CORPS' EXPERTISE.

D. IN DISCUSSING THE KRA PROJECT WE WOULD LIKE TO

MAKE ONE OTHER MATTER CLEAR: THE USG INTERPRETATION OF
THE LIMITED TEST BAN TREATY WOULD RULE OUT PARTICIPATION
IN ANY CONTEMPLATED NUCLEAR EXCAVATION BY SIGNATORIES TO
THAT TREATY AND WE REGRET VERY MUCH IF ANY AMERICAN

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OFFICIAL OR PRIVATE CITIZEN HAS LEAD HIM TO BELIEVE
THAT WE ARE CONSIDERING US PARTICIPATION.

6. THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE CONCURS IN THE POSITION
DESCRIBED ABOVE AND HAS BEEN ASKED TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS
TO ASSURE THAT ALL ELEMENTS OF THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS
ARE INSTRUCTED NOT TO BECOME ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROJECT
IN THE FUTURE IN ANY WAY WITHOUT PRIOR CLEARANCE FROM THE
DEPARTMENT OF STATE. RUSH

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